REMARKS

Applicants request favorable reconsideration and allowance of the subject application in view of the preceding amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 48-58 and 60-62 are presented for consideration. Claim 48 is the sole independent claim. Claim 48 has been amended to clarify features of the subject invention. Support for these changes in can be found in the original application, as filed. Therefore, no new matter has been added.

Applicants request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejections set forth in the final Office Action dated July 7, 2006.

Claims 48, 54, 58 and 60-62 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. patent application publication number 2003/0038929 to Tokuda et al. Claims 49-53 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Tokuda et al. publication as applied above to claim 48, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,746,562 to Hasegawa et al. Claims 55-57 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Tokuda et al. publication as applied above to claim 48, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,319,322 to Ueda et al. Applicants submit that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach or suggest many features of Applicants' present invention, as previously recited in

claims 48-62. Therefore, these rejections are traversed. Nevertheless, Applicants submit that independent claim 48, for example, as presented, amplifies the distinctions between the present invention and the cited art.

Independent claim 48 is directed to an exposure apparatus for exposing a wafer to an exposure light via a pattern of a reticle. The apparatus includes a chamber in which the exposure light passes, a conditioner configured to flow an inert gas through the chamber and to purge an atmosphere in the chamber with the inert gas, and a port through which the wafer is transferred between the chamber and another apparatus outside of the exposure apparatus. The port has a load-lock mechanism including a first door disposed between an internal space of the port and the chamber, a second door disposed between the internal space and the other apparatus, a pump configured to create a vacuum below atmospheric pressure in the port, and a supply mechanism configured to supply the inert gas into the port, in which the vacuum has been created by the pump, so that an atmosphere in the port is substantially the same as an atmosphere in the chamber.

In Applicants' view, Tokuda et al. discloses an exposure system a first unit in which a first apparatus transfers an image of a pattern of a mask onto a substrate. A second unit incorporating a second apparatus has a function different from that of the first apparatus. A connection unit connects the first unit and the second unit. An internal pressure of the

connection unit is set to be lower that an internal pressure of either of the first unit and the second unit, and is set to be higher than the pressure of the surroundings in which the connection unit is installed.

According to the invention of Claim 48 as currently amended, a conditioner is configured to flow an inert gas through a chamber of an exposure apparatus and to purge the atmospher in the chamber with the inert gas. A port through which a wafer is transferred between the chamber and another apparatus outside the exposure apparatus has a load-lock mechanism which includes a first door disposed between the internal space of the port and the chamber and a second door disposed between the internal space and the other apparatus.

Tokuda et al. may teach an exhausting apparatus. It is, however, clearly disclosed at paragraph [0088] of Tokuda et al. that "The internal pressure of the connection section 53 which becomes a buffer space between the projection exposure apparatus 51 and the coating and developing apparatus 52, is lower than the respective internal pressure of the projection exposure apparatus 51 and the coating and developing apparatus 52. Consequently, the flow of air between the projection exposure apparatus 51 and the coating and developing apparatus 52 through the connection section 53 can be intercepted. Furthermore, the internal pressure of the connection section 53 is set to be higher than the pressure of the clean room 58. As a result, infiltration of the atmosphere of the clean room 58 which contains dust and dirt or chemically

polluted substances, into the connection section 53 is prevented." Accordingly, it is not seen that Tokuda et al. in any manner teaches or suggests an exposure apparatus that exposes a wafer to exposure light in a chamber has the feature of an atmosphere being purged with inert gas rather than a vacuum and has a load-lock mechanism with a first door between the internal space of the port and the chamber and a second door between the internal space of the port and the other apparatus as in Claim 48. It is therefore believed that Claim 48 as currently amended is completely distinguished from Tokuda et al and is allowable.

Applicants submit that the cited art, whether taken individually or in combination, does not teach or suggest such features of the present invention, as recited in independent claim 48.

For the foregoing reasons, Applicants submit that the present invention, as recited in independent claim 48, is patentably defined over the cited art, whether that art is taken individually or in combination.

Dependent claims 49-58 and 60-62 also should be deemed allowable, in their own right, for defining other patentable features of the present invention in addition to those recited in independent claim 48. Further individual consideration of these dependent claims is requested.

Applicants further submit that the instant application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration, withdrawal of the rejection set forth in the above-noted Office Action and an early Notice of Allowance are requested.

Applicants' attorney, Steven E. Warner, may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010 All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,

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